

Hero

by Sofor

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Hero

****Hero****

Rachel and the others belong to KAA and Scholastic, and Mariah Carey sings 'Hero' Thanks to Ruby, who 'encouraged' me to finish the fic when I just had the song and quotes. And a big thank you to Jason. I love his profiles page, they're incredibly insightful, and inspired me to address the distance between Rachel and Cassie. And if you think I'm totally off about some point, feel free to tell me about it. My opinion certainly isn't the only one out there....

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

My name is Rachel.

Who am I?

Just a kid. A middle school kid with divorced parents and two little sisters. I go to school, do my homework, hang out with my friends. If you saw me I bet you wouldn't look twice. Just another suburban mall rat.

Nothing special.

Funny how that sounds like an insult.

****_There' s a hero**

> If you look inside your heart
 You don't have to be afraid
> Of what you are**

I was high on adrenaline. High on the rush of power and violence...

** _There's an answer
> If your reach into your soul
 And the sorrow that you know will
melt away_ **

Was that how Jake thought of me? As some crazed, violent nut who would do anything? No, of course not. He just knew I was good in a fight. That's all. It didn't mean anything. Besides, another part of my mind argued, wasn't it true? Wasn't I just the person to call if you needed to kill an Animorph?...

** _And then a hero comes along
> With the strength to carry on
 And you cast your fears aside
> And you know you can survive
 So when you feel like hope is gone

> Look inside you and be strong
 And you'll finally see the truth

> That a hero lies in you**

Tobias shrugged his human shoulders. He held up his hands to stare at his own fingers. "It is me," he said, sounding like he doubted it. "My old body. Here."

I ran to him. I don't really know why, I just did. I wanted to touch him. To know he was real.

** _It's a long road
> When you face the world alone
 No one reaches out a hand for you
to hold_**

Tobias was dead. Jake might still die. And I was going to have to go after David. I was going to have to hunt him down.

I was going to hunt him down and destroy him.

No, not destroy. That was a weasel word. It was vague, meaningless. I was going to kill him.

I felt sick inside. It might have been the morphing that was annihilating my internal organs and replacing them with the primitive organs of a housefly.

Or it might have been the feeling that comes from rage and hate.

See, I cared for Tobias. I don't think I even knew how much I cared till right then.

But if David had killed him, I would have revenge. I would make Tobias' murderer pay.

** _You can find love
> If you search within yourself
 And that emptiness you felt will
disappear_**

It hurt me to see him reveal the damage that had been done to him. I have strong feelings for Tobias. The kind you can't help. The kind that seem inevitable. Like they were always there, even before you knew the person.

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** _And then a hero comes along  
> With the strength to carry on<br> And you cast your fears aside  
> And you know you can survive<br> So when you feel like hope is gone  
  
> Look inside you and be strong<br> And you'll finally see the truth  
  
> That a hero lies in you<em>**
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War is not a video game. In a real war, you make desperate decisions and deal with desperate consequences. You spill blood and your blood gets spilled. You brush up against death. You change. You're warped until ever being average and ordinary again is an impossible dream.

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** _The lord knows  
> Dreams are hard to follow<br> But don't let anyone tear them  
away_**
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I barked out a laugh. Then I stopped myself. He thought I was suicidal! Did he think I'd sawed through the floor of my house, too? Good grief. That's why he was trying to recruit me for The Sharing. He thought I was depressed or whatever. A perfect recruit for his little Controller organization.

Yeah, right. Where do I sign up, Mr. Chapman? Could there be a special discount on dues for Animorphs?

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** _Hold on  
> There will be tomorrow<br> In time you'll find the way_**
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Each battle changes us. Transforms us on the inside as much as on the outside.

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** _And then a hero comes along  
> With the strength to carry on  
> And you cast your fears aside  
> And you know you can survive  
gone,  
> Look inside you and be strong  
> And you'll finally see the truth  
> That a hero lies in you**
```

But then, I guess that's true of anyone. You can never be sure whether the pretty blond lugging a pair of bulging Express bags through the mall is just another sweet, ditzy, harmless mall rat. Or me...

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** _That a hero lies in
you **
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I sighed and flipped off the radio.

The stupid song had brought up too many memories. Some of them I would just prefer to forget.

_I am so tired of being the 'killer' ! It's not fair ! ****I'm**** the 'bloodthirsty one?' It's not like all of the others are perfect saints...

Doesn't Cassie see that, through all her moralizing? Doesn't Marco think, before he makes some idiot comment, that he's killed just as many people as I have? What right does Jake have to use me to do his dirty work?

And Ax... well, he's the really bloodthirsty one. Not me. Ax is in this war for revenge for his brother. He fights because of his inbred hatred for Yeerks. Him and his superior, arrogant Andalite attitude... but the others don't see it that way.

Tobias... yeah, he's killed his share too. And he's certainly done enough hunting to make up for any differences. But that's killing to eat, to survive. So that's okay. That's totally different from the reason I kill.

Fighting for the freedom of the planet isn't about survival ?

I am just so sick of this !

Tired of the stereotype, sick of the opinions the others have formed of me.

I don't want to be Xena anymore. Let someone else do the killing. I quit.

I mean, why is it up to me to save the world ?

I got up and closed my window. It was raining, and I didn't want any 'visits' tonight anyway.

And as the lightning split the night and thunder crashed, I sank down onto my bed and did something I don't make a habit of doing often; I cried.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

An hour or so later, I heard a knock at the door.

And a few minutes later, another one.

I'd forgotten. I was home alone, there was no one else to answer the door.

"It had better not be who I think it is..."

Wiping my eyes with the back of my hand, I ran down the stairs, took a moment to compose myself, and opened the door.

"Tobias, what are..."

"Geez, Rachel, I know you hate my fashion style, but I didn't think it was that bad," laughed Cassie as she walked inside. She saw my face and immediately stopped laughing. "What happened, Rach ? Why are you crying ? Did you and Tobias have a fight or something ?"

I shook my head. "No, nothing like that," I mumbled. "I just... I just...."

I burst into fresh tears, startling Cassie a bit. Yeah, she's been my best friend for years, but I almost never cry.

She hugged me gently, and as I calmed down a little, she looked at me and smiled.

"I'm going to make us some hot chocolate, 'kay ?"

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

"...and every time I hear Marco call me Xena, I just want him to shut up. I'm so sick of being the psycho one, Cass. I mean, you're the 'killer with a conscience,' remember ? Whereas I'm what, the 'coldhearted' killer ?"

"When I quit, a while back, do you remember what you said to me ?" Cassie asked softly.

I nodded my head.

"You've just said the whole world can drop dead, so long as ****you****, Cassie, don't have to end up turning into ****me****."_

"Yeah. It was really a harsh thing to say. I'm sorry, Cassie."

"No," she said, quietly. I noticed she wasn't really looking at me, but at the table, the wall, everywhere else but my face. "You were right."

"What ?"

"You do scare me, Rachel. Well, not in that way... because I know you would never do anything to me... but I'm scared of what you've become. What I could become. I'm the one who's sorry."

I didn't say anything. I just sat there, in shock. I had known, of course, but to hear Cassie actually say it.... well, it hurt. It hurt a lot.

"Is that... is that why you never come over anymore ? You don't want to have anything to do with me ?" I asked coldly. I slid off my chair and walked over to the window. "Don't worry, whatever I have isn't catching."

"Oh, Rachel, it's not like that... I don't come over 'cuz I'm busy at the barn. Or with Jake..."

"Oh, come off it, Cassie, don't lie to me. All of a sudden you have no time whatsoever for your best friend ? Well, I certainly wouldn't want to keep you from your busy life."

"Rachel..."

I cut her off, my voice frigid. "I think you'd better leave."

I heard her sigh, and leave. I waited until I was sure she was gone, then I sat back down, staring straight ahead. I couldn't even think. Too many things were going through my brain...

I saw, on the table, an envelope that had been left for me. Cassie's writing was on the front. ****Rachel****, was all it said.

I opened it slowly, and drew out the letter, my hands shaking slightly.

Rachel,

Yes, I knew you were going to throw me out. Don't be so shocked. Remember David ? I knew how he was going to act, too. And I trapped him. You may have been the decoy, you might've watched him for the two hours and left him on that island, but I trapped him. Me.

You see, it's not like you're the only ruthless one. All of us have lost our innocence, become colder and harder than we would have been otherwise. But, as you say, we definitely see you as the killer.

Not me, Jake, Marco, Ax, or Tobias. You.

You have something dark inside you, Rachel. I don't know where it came from. It wasn't always there.

Why ? I don't know. The war's changed you. It's almost like the evil of the Yeerks is a disease, and you've caught it.

And, even as I'm writing this, I can picture your flash of hatred at the word. Yeerk.

That's what makes it so hard for me, I think. I don't see them as evil. Their enslavement of other sentient species ? That's evil. Their murdering, their torture, what they do to their hosts ? That's evil. And Visser Three is evil. Unbelievably so.

But, knowing Aftran, knowing Illim, how can I see the Yeerk species as evil ?

Like I said, that's what makes this whole damn war so hard for me. I lay awake at night, trying to think of ways to stop the war without all this bloodshed. I can't even rest because I'm too busy crying. Crying for the latest hosts, and yes, even the Yeerks, that I've killed. Who am I to decide who's right or wrong ? Who am I to decide that the Yeerks have to go back to their pools? When I was trapped as a caterpillar, I understood their desperation. To be blind and deaf, cut off from the world and in such a useless, helpless body... As Aftran said, how can I ask the Yeerks to do that to themselves ?

But at the same time, I would rather be giving myself an ulcer over the 'moral crap', as Marco so naively puts it, than not worrying about it at all. That's what keeps me human. I wouldn't want to disregard right and wrong. Because then, what's the difference between me and the Yeerks I fight ?

You may find it easier to be ruthless. I'm sure it's easier to kill when you see your enemy as pure evil. But, I think it's hurting you, inside. Sometimes you're out of control. Sometimes I think you're going to go crazy.

Sometimes I think I'm already crazy.

But, Rachel, hold on to your sense of right and wrong. In the end, that's what keeps us from being murderers.

Hold on to your soul.

Love always, Cassie.

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

I clutched the letter to my heart.

"I'll try, Cassie," I whispered.

"I'll try...."

End
file.